



Extending the platform debate beyond cities: assessing the scale and scope of platform-mediated childcare work in Switzerland

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Abstract. Platform work is predominantly framed as an urban phenomenon, a presumption that we challenge in this paper. We scraped data from online childcare platforms operating in Switzerland to assess the scale and geographies of platform work. Our paper contributes to the debate on the ambivalent effects of visibilising platform workers in feminised labour market segments. It provides a critical reflection on the potential and limitations of scraping platform data as a critical/feminist method of counter-mapping platformisation. While much remains opaque, our scraping discloses a highly concentrated market dominated by one platform and a surplus workforce, with far more worker than customer profiles. Our roughly 58 000 analysed worker profiles give no indication of platformisation reducing the feminisation of childcare work. However, we find that childcare platforms are not primarily an urban phenomenon: our data disclose only a very weak correlation between population density and prevalence of worker profiles. Thus, we argue that the debate on platformisation needs to reflect the implications of its urban bias.

1 Introduction

Since online labour mediation platforms emerged about 15 years ago, a large and still-growing body of labour research has scrutinised how they operate, who works for them and under what conditions. In geography, scholars have used the concept of “platform urbanism” (Barns, 2020) to describe how internet platforms are becoming increasingly powerful in shaping urban spaces and lives in cities. Platforms fundamentally reconfigure not only how cities are governed but also how people live – how they perceive, navigate, use and produce urban space (Strüver and Bauriedl, 2022). Platform urbanism focuses on cities because urban spaces provide the density of potential consumers, workers and connected devices that make them attractive sites for platforms to offer their services (Leszczynski, 2020).

This focus on cities was mirrored in the early platform scholarship that predominantly analysed ride hailing plat-

forms such as Uber and delivery platforms such as Deliveroo or Flink (Silva et al., 2025). Due to their cubic backpacks in fluorescent colours, delivery workers in particular have become one of the most visible workforces in today’s cities and consequently have also been widely researched. According to a recent analysis by Silva et al. (2025), 41 % of research papers on platform labour published before March 2024 focus on taxi services, 22 % on freelance work and 16 % on delivery. Domestic work platforms are notably absent, with only 2 % of research articles devoted to them.

Feminist scholars soon problematised the imbalance in early research on platform work that privileged the masculinised labour market segments visible in public space (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). They pointed out that historically invisibilised labour in private households again remains invisible and frequently sidelined in platform research (Kluzik, 2022). In recent years, the platformisation of feminised labour market segments such as home care and do-

mestic work has gained increasing attention (for a recent overview see e.g. Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2023). This broadening of platform analyses also posed the question as to the extent to which platformisation is a predominantly urban phenomenon (Bauriedl and Strüver, 2020).

Assessing the range and size of the home care and domestic work economy has always been a difficult endeavour (Mattmann et al., 2017). A large share of the work remains informal and does not appear in labour statistics. This has not changed significantly with the rise in platforms. While on-demand labour platforms have led to a selective formalisation of the market (Huws, 2019; Van Doorn, 2022), jobs mediated via marketplace platforms are still typically informal (Ettarfi and Schwiter, 2025). Thus, conventional labour market statistics typically capture only a small share of the market. Published in 2021, the most comprehensive Swiss government report on platform labour to date illustrates this problem: it acknowledges the difficulty of measuring the prevalence of platform labour and then relies on the data of the Swiss Labour Market Survey (SAKE) to state that platform labour is not widespread in Switzerland and only generates marginal added incomes. Not just because of this finding, the report concludes that there is to date no need for legal reforms (Swiss Federal Council, 2021). The Swiss Federal Council recently reaffirmed this decision when declining that the EU directive of 23 October 2024 on improving working conditions in platform work (European Parliament, 2024) requires further action on the part of Switzerland (Swiss Federal Council, 2024).

We would argue that the Swiss government's assessment that platform work is marginal misses the point since most of the platform economy is not visible in conventional labour market surveys. If we want to know more about its actual size and geographic prevalence – in particular with regard to home care and domestic work – we need to explore other routes of assessing the prevalence of platform work. To do so, we scraped data from the labour mediation platforms themselves to ask what platform data can tell us about the size and the geographical prevalence of the Swiss platform labour and its platform workers. We focus on childcare, which is particularly invisible in academic as well as public debates.

Conceptually, we engage with debates in feminist platform and labour studies on the ambivalences of visibilising women platform workers. Methodologically, we understand our paper as a methodological intervention in the tradition of critical/feminist digital geographies. By “counter-mapping platformisation” (Ecker et al., 2025), we reflect on what we can learn from scraped digital data, what remains invisible and how counter-mapping challenges dominant narratives of platformisation. In line with existing research, our results show a highly concentrated market with one dominating platform and a surplus workforce, with workers outnumbering customers by far. Furthermore, our data show no indication that platforms would contribute to reducing the pronounced feminisation of care work. However, we find only

a weak correlation between population density and worker profiles per capita. Thus, we argue that the predominantly urban-centred focus of platform research must be extended beyond big cities on an empirical as well as conceptual level.

2 Literature review

The last decade has witnessed a rise in platform work around the globe. However, knowledge on how many people actually work for platforms, how many hours they invest and what they earn remains patchy. Many labour mediation platforms either do not share differentiated information or do so only as far as it serves their own interests (Silva et al., 2025). Thus, researchers caution against conducting studies with data provided directly by platform companies as they have an incentive to selectively share data and collaborate with researchers that make them look good (Kilhoffer, 2021). The current situation might change with the implementation of the EU directive of 23 October 2024 on improving working conditions in platform work. Article 17 requires platforms to disclose comprehensive information on numbers of workers, hours worked and income generated (European Parliament, 2024). However, it remains to be seen whether and how quickly this requirement will be implemented and enforced across the 27 EU member states.

For this reason, platform research has so far predominantly relied on user-reported data that were collected through interviewing or surveying platform workers and collecting ethnographic data (Silva et al., 2025). On the one hand, these studies have provided immensely valuable insights into the mechanisms platforms use to surveil and manage workers to their advantage (Tuomi et al., 2024), into the workforce they recruit that typically consists of newly arrived migrants (Stingl and Orth, 2025; Van Doorn and Vijay, 2021), into the often precarious working conditions they impose (Ticona, 2022; Wiesböck et al., 2023), and into their negative effects on the social reproduction of platform workers (James, 2024b; Riemann, 2023). On the other hand, these studies disclose manifold strategies of individual worker survival and resistance (Ettarfi, 2024; Ojeda-Pereira, 2025) and collective organising (Orth, 2022; Worker Center Berlin, 2024). Notwithstanding this rich and important body of knowledge, user-reported data have proven to be only of limited use to estimate the overall number of platform workers. Qualitative interviews and ethnographies are unsuitable for estimating the quantitative prevalence of a phenomenon. Also, surveys often fail to adequately represent multiply marginalised groups such as platform workers (O'Farrell and Montagnier, 2020). Existing estimates on the prevalence of platform work thus vary greatly. Depending on the study, less than 1 % or up to 20 % of the population is identified as platform workers (Kilhoffer, 2021). In order to better represent prevalence of platform work, studies have attempted to gain their data directly by scraping worker profiles from platforms (Kässi and Lehdon-

virta, 2018; Trautwein et al., 2025). As a method, scraping means extracting and collecting data from online sources. It promises to open up the black box and allow for “seeing through” platforms, but it is also limited to the data that are accessible (Ecker et al., 2025:5). Furthermore, it poses considerable technical challenges as many platforms impede repeated or automated data requests (Khan et al., 2022).

From a feminist perspective, our endeavour to assess the number of platform workers in care labour bears much ambivalence. As mentioned above, feminist scholars have long problematised the bias in platform research towards male-dominated labour market segments and the resulting invisibility of the specific challenges in feminised platform work and also for women as platform workers (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). They have demonstrated the failure of platforms to combat the persisting informality of employment relations in feminised labour market segments (Pulignano et al., 2023). They have noted the absence of legal protection during pregnancy and maternity and for platform workers with care responsibilities (James, 2024a), as well as the gendered risks of being exposed to sexualised violence (Lentz and Strüver, 2026). From this point of view, putting feminised platform work equally on the public radar is undoubtedly important.

However, feminist research also shows that there are different forms of visibility in platform work, and not all of them are necessarily advantageous for workers (Gruszka and Böhm, 2022). While platforms have so far managed to largely eschew institutional visibility, i.e. the formal declaration of platform work to social security institutions, they have promoted an often problematic individual visibility of workers (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). Marketplace platforms in particular create a “catalogue effect” that increases competition and puts further pressure on already low wages (Pignolo, 2025). In addition, that effect forces workers to disclose personal information in their online profiles. Platform design thereby presets what personal data should be shared to attract jobs (Ettarfi, 2025), often including photographs and sometimes even sensitive information on health, such as smoking habits, vaccination status, etc. This individual visibility poses additional challenges for platform workers who are read as female or as non-white and are therefore disproportionately affected by sexualised and racialised violence. For workers without valid residence permits, it heightens the risk of being exposed to authorities.

Besides this individual visibility, however, the platformisation of care can also contribute to a more positive collective visibility in that it draws public attention to the working conditions in platformised labour market segments. In Switzerland, one of the major cleaning platforms recently took this up in an omnipresent public advertising campaign with the slogan *Saubere Anstellung, saubere Reinigung* (clean employment, clean cleaning). Such discourses do not automatically lead to positive changes in practice. Nevertheless, they contribute to bringing labour conditions to the political

agenda and strengthen already-existing mobilisation for improving working conditions in these feminised labour market segments (Meyer-Habighorst et al., 2025; Schilliger, 2022).

On another note, counting platform workers is an ambivalent endeavour because it strengthens the belief in statistics. Feminist scholars have long challenged the dominance of abstract numbers for explaining the world (England, 2015). They have argued that we need to focus on individual human beings to understand how they live and make a living in specific socio-spatial contexts (Richardson, 2018). They foreground the importance of acknowledging the impact of intersectional identities (Lykke, 2010), bodies and affective relations (Lentz and Strüver, 2026). And they emphasise the advantages of doing research participatively with the research subjects rather than about them (Wynne-Jones et al., 2015).

We are aware of this valid critique. Mere numbers grant only limited insights into the lives of people affected. More often than not, marginalised populations are not adequately represented in such statistics. On-demand labour arrangements are particularly difficult to count, and thus their prevalence tends to be underestimated (Mattmann et al., 2017). In addition, counting is particularly sensitive in feminised labour market segments where a large share of labour arrangements are informal. Numbers may then suggest a pseudo transparency and accuracy. Despite these caveats, we also acknowledge that there is power in numbers, and we see the need to challenge the declaration by the Swiss state that no regulation of platform labour is necessary as its numbers are negligible. In this sense, we understand our endeavour as an attempt at “counter-mapping platformisation” against dominant power structures (Ecker et al., 2025). Our aim is to open alternative access to data beyond what platforms themselves publish and what labour market statistics count while critically reflecting the limitations of our methodology.

3 Methods

3.1 Selection of platforms

To select the platforms for data collection, we used a keyword search on standard search engines to find all potentially relevant web-based platforms that offered childcare services in German-speaking Switzerland. We included all websites that explicitly addressed both potential customers (i.e. people looking for care workers) and potential care workers. We then had to exclude platforms where neither worker nor customer profiles were accessible, as this also meant that we could not collect data. This excluded on-demand platforms which match workers and customers themselves directly and limited our analysis to marketplace platforms which allow them to reach out to each other. Furthermore, our sample does not include platforms that are primarily aimed at a French-speaking or Italian-speaking Swiss population. This selection strategy resulted in a sample of eight scrapable platforms: Babysitting24, Babysits.ch, Care.com, Mis-

Grosi, RockMyBaby, ZipfelZapf, GreatAuPair and Tagesmutter Verein Zürich. As Babysitting24 runs a senior care platform (called Seniorservice24) that is structurally extremely similar, we included this as a contrasting example.

3.2 Scraping and cleaning data

To assess the number of workers/customers and their activity levels on the platforms, we scraped all profiles and data regarding the activity levels of users if they were available (such as when they last used the platform and when they became a member).

Care.com and GreatAuPair offer multiple categories of service offerings (such as “tutoring” on Care.com). In those cases, we scraped the “childcare” category on Care.com and the “babysitter” category on GreatAuPair. Our data collection relied on scraping information that was available either publicly or with an account on the platform, which comes with practical constraints.

Scraping does not scale easily as CAPTCHAs, layout changes and the need for sleep timers (to avoid detection or server overload) require regular human oversight. Collecting data therefore required considerable effort for each platform. While smaller platforms that contained a list of all profiles could be scraped relatively quickly, larger platforms required a postal code search, which then returned only user profiles for the searched area. In these cases, we searched and scraped the data for all postal codes in Switzerland based on the Swiss Federal Office of Topography’s official directory of postal codes (Swisstopo, 2024).

As the postal code search typically returns not only profiles from the searched-for postal codes but also profiles in close proximity, profiles often appear in multiple postal code searches. We therefore deduplicated our results for each platform. Given that every profile came with a unique user ID, we were able to ensure a clean deduplication. Getting users in close proximity to a postal code also meant that we collected data from workers in other countries, which we removed in the cleaning step by using the Nominatim API (Nominatim Contributors, 2026) to access OpenStreetMap location data to discard users outside of Switzerland.

Note that some platforms (e.g. Babysitting24) discourage scraping individual profiles via their robots.txt. The robots.txt is a file that websites use to specify rules for bots and scrapers, e.g. which pages they may or may not access. There are multiple reasons for why websites might want to prevent scraping. One is that scrapers can request pages at an extremely high frequency, which can put extra strain on the website’s servers. To minimise negative impact on platforms, we ran scrapers mainly at night with delays between requests. When we had to create accounts to access pages, we used the platforms’ privacy settings to keep our accounts invisible to other users to avoid user interaction. All data were stored securely and are reported in aggregated form only.

3.3 Feature processing

After scraping and cleaning the data, we pre-processed the data with respect to activity levels, gender and location for analysis.

3.3.1 Estimating platform activity

Not all profiles on care platforms represent active platform users. Some users may create an account out of curiosity and never return, while others may use the platform to find a longer-term job or a child carer and later become inactive. We therefore estimated the number of users who are actively looking for platform work or a platform worker by considering a user to be active if (1) they logged into the platform within the last 31 d and (2) did not sign up for the platform within the last 31 d. In our data analysis, we refer to a user fulfilling these requirements as “active”. We set the threshold at 31 d because the largest platform (Babysitting24) also uses a threshold of 1 month to determine (in)activity. On platforms for which we did not have access to the membership length, we considered active users to be those who were last online within the last 31 d, so we only use the first condition. We refer to a user fulfilling this requirement as “recently active”. The differences in metadata (e.g. how and in what granularity the date when the user was last online or joined the platform is shown) between platforms do not allow us to compare activity levels between platforms but can give us insight into how active users are on these platforms more generally.

We acknowledge that this approach has limitations. First, “active” does not imply that this user necessarily found a worker or any work via the platform (let alone for full-time), but just that they tried to. Second, it likely undercounts users who found longer-term placements and have not recently visited the platform and may instead overcount those who recently registered on a platform but never found work or a worker. Third, it is also limited from a feminist perspective in that it undercounts (predominantly female) workers who take longer leave, for example for maternity leave or due to childcare responsibilities (cf. James, 2024a). This is particularly unfortunate as it invisibilises aspects that are particular to life courses of women.

In addition, previous studies on delivery, ride hailing and also crowdwork platforms have disclosed a widespread practice of several workers sharing one user account or users subletting their accounts to other workers (Tironi and Albornoz, 2022). On delivery and ride hailing platforms, this can be advantageous for workers whose own accounts have been deactivated by the platforms or who do not have work permits and are therefore unable to sign up on platforms that check certificates. On crowdwork platforms, sharing an account with high ratings might provide better access to work. Such practices might lead to undercounting the effective number of workers. As the marketplace platforms we analysed for this

study do not check certificates and hardly any have ratings, there is no equivalent need for account sharing. Furthermore, childcare platforms typically require workers to share photographs and personal information about themselves to create trust for customers, which creates substantial hurdles for account sharing. For this reason, we assume that the number of workers' user accounts roughly equals the number of workers looking for jobs via the platforms we analysed.

3.3.2 Gender inference

Childcare work has traditionally been dominated by women. The advent of platforms has raised the question whether platformisation will lead to more men entering this labour market segment. To test this hypothesis, we sought gender data for users. However, none of the platforms we scraped showed users' self-reported gender in their profiles. The only platform that would have indirectly given us access to self-reported gender is Babysitting24, as it is possible to filter users by gender in the search function (using only a female/male binary gender selection). Because this would have required running twice the number of searches, which would have significantly increased the scraping time, we therefore opted to scrape the profiles without filtering and infer gender the same way as for the other platforms: by using name-based gender inference from an application programming interface (API) (Gender API, 2026).

The API returns one of three labels: female, male or unknown. It does not include a non-binary category, which is sensible given that names typically do not indicate non-binary identities. Non-binary individuals often use gender-neutral names, but these names are also widely used by cisgender individuals, making them unsuitable for reliable classification. We cleaned the name fields before submitting them to the API. For some platforms, for example, names included a first initial of the last name (e.g. "Maria S."). The API returns a confidence score ("accuracy") for each prediction, which is defined as a confidence measure that they calculate based on their data pool of name and gender pairings. A score of 100 indicates maximum confidence. We chose a minimum accuracy of 80. Gender inferences with a lower accuracy were re-labelled as "unknown".

Lastly, we manually reviewed a subset of the gender labels to correct obvious misclassifications. This was especially necessary in cases where the input name was a company rather than a person's name. In those cases, the API sometimes returned an incorrect gender rather than "unknown". In those instances, we reassigned the gender label to "unknown".

We are aware that this name-based classification limits the explanatory power of our analysis in that it reproduces a cis-normative understanding of gender. It does not tell us about how our users would self-identify and thus does not allow us to break out of a binary gender classification. This is a limitation that we share with many quantitative studies that rely

on name-based gender inference or self-identification data based on only binary options. Non-binary gender identities thus remain uncoded and invisible.

3.3.3 Location standardisation

To figure out the extent to which platform-based childcare is an urban phenomenon, we mapped users to locations and checked for correlation between population density and users per capita. For our analysis, we used the population density data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO, 2023). We had access to location information from the users on all platforms, but there is no standard format for this information. Given the format of our population density data, which provides the population density for every municipality name, we tried to count the number of users for every municipality.

While we could identify each user's municipality or village, we sometimes also had users' postal code, canton name or country name. This additional information helped resolve issues when mapping the municipality name to our population density data. Such issues can occur for multiple reasons. (1) Due to the multilingual nature of Switzerland, the same municipality can have multiple names. Even on the same platform, the same municipality might thus be spelled in different ways. On Babysitting24, for example, we find the city of Geneva listed as *Genève*, *Genf*, *Ginevra* and *Geneva*. We therefore standardised municipality names based on official city names given by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2026) (listed alongside German, French, Italian, Romansh and English translations). We added unmatched names that we came across that we could easily match ourselves, such as the Portuguese *Zurique*, to the list. (2) Some city names contain the prefix "St.", which is sometimes spelled out as "Sankt" (in German) or "Saint" (in French). These variations are not included in the SFSO's list, so we had to normalise these names ourselves. However, these kinds of names are sometimes not displayed properly (for example, on the platform MisGrosi, we found instances of municipality names like "St. Moritz" being displayed as "St." only) or are scraped incorrectly (only scraping the "St" instead of "St. Gallen"). In cases like these, we relied on the postal code to find the correct municipality name. (3) Sometimes we only had the village name, which is at times different from the municipality name. To map our data to the population density data, however, we needed the municipality name. (4) Some municipalities share names and can only be differentiated by the addition of their canton or municipality. (5) Sometimes, the combination of the village name and postal code matches multiple municipality names.

We standardised the location of users as follows. First, we matched the municipality or village name to the translation dataset to get the official name where possible. For the location names that we could not match to our population density data, we checked if the name matched a village name in the official directory of towns and cities (Swisstopo, 2024) and

then got the corresponding municipality name. If that did not work, we used the postal code to get the municipality name if it was available to us. If this also did not work, in the special cases of Babysitting24 and Seniorservice24, we ran our location data through Nominatim API (Nominatim contributors, 2026) to remove users based outside of Switzerland. The full location data that we derived from the Nominatim API included the municipality name for users based in Switzerland, giving us better chances of matching users' location data to the population density data. Due to these issues, our standardisation of location names is necessarily an imperfect one. However, the process worked well enough for our aim of understanding correlation between users per capita and population density: we were able to standardise all but 285 of the total 88 269 user locations. Only in 0.32 % of cases were we unable to map the user to a location that appears in our population density data.

Our analysis of location data has a key limitation: users might not register at the address where they are actually located, but in areas with a high population density where they expect to find most job opportunities to increase the visibility of their profiles. We did indeed find some indication of this worker strategy when analysing user locations at the neighbourhood level in the city of Zurich. This analysis showed a disproportionate share of workers registering exactly in the city centre. Our data do not allow us to assess the extent of this phenomenon, but this means that we probably undercount workers who live in areas with a low population density and overcount those who live in areas with a high population density. This is relevant for our results presented in Sect. 4.3.

4 Results

4.1 What is the size of the platform market for childcare?

In the following, we present the data we scraped from eight childcare platforms and one elderly care platform. One of our central questions regarding the platformisation of care work is market size. As there is no single metric that could comprehensively answer this question, we approach this question from multiple angles.

4.1.1 Total number of gigs and workers

Table 1 provides an overview of the number of accounts we found on each platform from April till July 2025. These numbers exclude duplicates (i.e. if the same profile gets shown in multiple searches). Note that on some platforms, users can set their profiles to a private mode, where they can browse other profiles but cannot be found by other users. Such profiles can also not be seen by our scraper and are thus automatically excluded from our analysis.

Table 1. Number of worker and customer profiles by platform.

Platform	Care type	No. of workers	No. of customers
Babysitting24	Childcare	50 242	23 040
Babysits.ch	Childcare	4983	912
Care.com (childcare)	Childcare	2436	—*
Tagesmutter Verein Zürich	Childcare	222	—
GreatAuPair	Childcare	98	10
MisGrosi	Childcare	64	1439
RockMyBaby	Childcare	—	28
ZipfelZapf	Childcare	—	23
Seniorservice24	Senior care	6021	547

* Care.com does show customer profiles. However, we were unable to implement a reliable scraper with the resources available to us. This is why the customers of Care.com are missing in this table and in our further analyses.

The user numbers reveal a highly concentrated market, with one platform (Babysitting24) having 10 times more profiles than any other. While two more platforms (Babysits.ch and Care.com) have sizeable numbers of more than 1000 workers, all other platforms have much lower worker numbers. The oligopolising (Costhek Abílio, 2023) tendencies of platforms, in which one tends to dominate the market, have been observed across platform markets. They result from network effects that incentivise users to choose the biggest platform in the hope of finding the best offers (Srnicsek, 2017).

4.1.2 Active gigs and workers

Using our definition of (in)activity from Sect. 3.3.1, between 14 % and 37 % of workers and between 8 % and 38 % of customers are active per platform (see Fig. 1).¹ This corresponds to 9681 active workers on Babysitting24 and 1821 active workers on Babysits.ch. For Care.com, we cannot estimate activity in the same way. We know that 453 of 2436 registered workers were “recently active” (logged in within the last month), but this number may also include users who joined during that period. When we combine the worker datasets across these three platforms and remove users with the same name, age (± 1 year) and municipality, we obtain a total of 11 472 active workers. This can be compared to the approximately 100 000 formal day care spots in Switzerland (Lüssi, 2024). Assuming a childcare ratio of 1 : 4, this corresponds to roughly 25 000 formal day care workers nationwide. Compared to this number, the population of active workers on childcare platforms is substantial.

¹ We excluded MisGrosi in these numbers even though the platform has a feature that is meant to indicate whether a platform worker is active or not. Using this feature, we found 29 of the 64 registered platform workers to be active, so just below 50 %. However, as we do not know how this activity status is determined, we do not consider it further in our analysis.

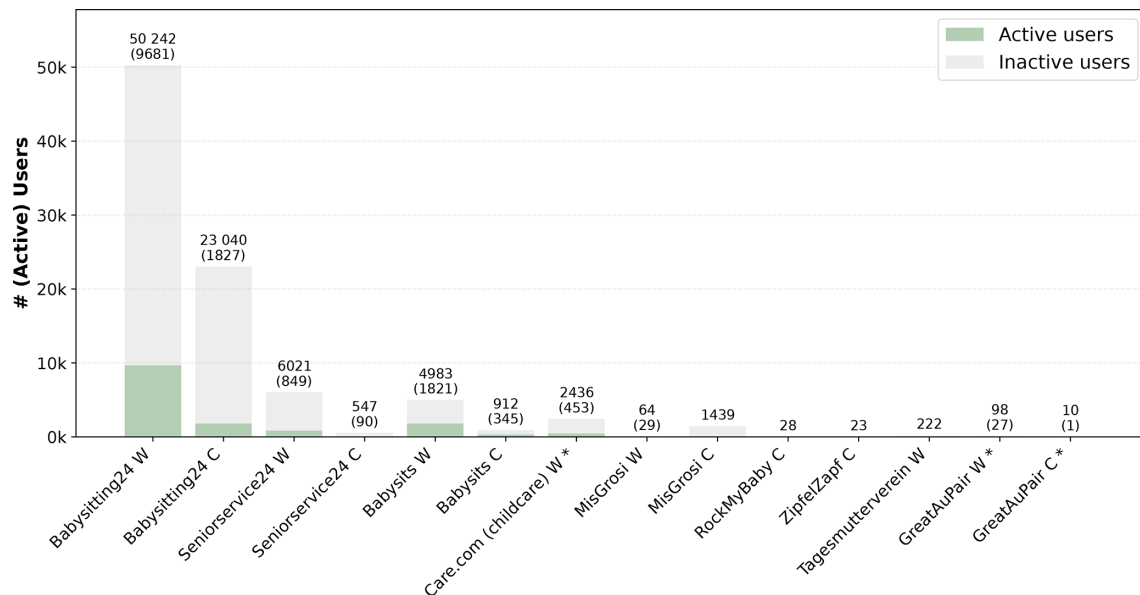


Figure 1. Number of users on the analysed platforms. The number of active users is given in parentheses if available. Asterisks mark platforms where the number of active users comes from the “recently active” flag, i.e. where we only know that the users logged in within the last month but do not know whether the user only just registered in that time period. “W” is short for “workers”, and “C” is short for “customers”.

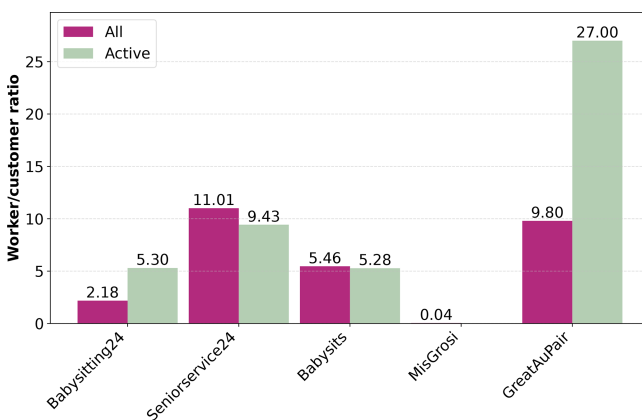


Figure 2. Ratio of (active) platform workers to (active) customers on the platforms for which we have data on both workers and customers.

4.1.3 Worker / customer ratio

The worker-to-customer ratios across the analysed care platforms reveal stark imbalances that are indicative of a surplus workforce. As Fig. 2 shows, workers outnumber customers in all but one case by a factor of 2.18 to 11.01. When considering only active users, workers still outnumber customers by a factor of 5.28 to 9.43.²

²Here, we excluded GreatAuPair as the number of active users is so small that the ratio would not be robust.

A key reason for the surplus of workers compared to customers is that platforms actively strive to attract a workforce much larger than their customer base because this gives potential customers more choices and flexibility. This oversupply weakens the negotiation position of workers and potentially leaves many of them unable to find jobs. Thereby, they mostly operate on standby, looking for work and ready to work if they find a job (Keller, 2023). The price for the abundance of choices and flexibility for customers is thus borne by the workers (Keller, 2022).

A notable exception to this imbalance is MisGrosi, a platform whose name literally translates to “my grandma”. It thus aims to help parents find a substitute grandma for their kids. Here, customers outnumber workers by a factor of 22.5 (0.04 workers per customer). The scarcity of “grandparent workers” compared to the large number of parents seeking childcare on this platform can be explained in several ways. One explanation is that the target demographic for the “grandparent” role may be less tech-savvy than the potential customers. However, we also hypothesise that parents might also expect “grandparents” to offer care for free or at much lower rates, as the concept of the platform focuses on the familial construct of grandmothers, suggesting the workers might not need the income from this work and would do the work out of love.

Overall, our data mirror the broader pattern of an oversupply of workers: the rhetoric of flexibility that is common in the platform economy often disguises this structural imbalance. As long as there is this reserve of workers, customers’ needs are prioritised while the risks of irregular hours and

lack of available jobs are placed onto workers (Wiesböck et al., 2023).

4.1.4 Estimating mediated gigs based on ratings and bookings

To assess the amount of care work that is actually mediated through platforms, we analysed review information as a proxy for mediated gigs wherever such data are available. This is the case for Babysitting24 (workers), Seniorservice24 (workers), Care.com (workers) and Babysits.ch (workers and customers). We find that, across all platforms, reviews are extremely sparse: considering all scraped worker profiles, the median number of reviews is zero on every platform. Mean values are very low, ranging from 0.01 reviews per worker on Seniorservice24 to 0.14 on Care.com.

For two platforms, we also have access to the number of bookings. Again, we find a median of 0 and a very low mean of 0.10 (Babysits) to 0.14 (Care.com) bookings per worker profile. This could mean that the platforms mediate very little work. However, this would be at odds with the high user numbers we found. Rather, we assume that workers and customers use the platforms to get in touch with each other but often do not leave reviews and also do not register their transaction as a formal booking but arrange it off-platform. This can be advantageous as it might allow them to save on platform commissions (Gruszka et al., 2025). For the purpose of this paper, however, this means that our data do not give us any estimate as to how many transactions occur. Neither ratings nor bookings provide us with a reliable assessment of the amount of care work that is actually mediated through these platforms. From a feminist perspective, this is relevant because it means that much of the feminised care work remains invisible also in our age of apparent data abundance – not just in labour market statistics but also in our scraping data – even when the work is being paid and mediated through platforms.

4.2 Who are the platform workers?

4.2.1 Age

Across care platforms, we observe pronounced age differences between types of care work, most notably between childcare and senior care. Among the scraped platforms, Babysitting24, Seniorservice24, Babysits, Care.com (childcare) and GreatAuPair provide age information for workers, with very high coverage rates (between 94 % and 100 % of profiles). In the following, we present the data only for the first four of these platforms, as GreatAuPair does not have a sufficient number of worker profiles to reliably calculate age distribution. Our results show that the childcare platforms consistently attract young workers, while our senior care platform is characterised by significantly older workers. These differences probably reflect the distinct life stages,

Table 2. Age statistics of platform workers by platform.

Platform	Mean age	Median age	Under 25 (%)	<i>N</i>
Babysitting24	28.8	25	48.2	50 242
Babysits.ch	24.5	21	66.5	4686
Care.com (childcare)	34.0	29	33.1	2430
Seniorservice24	42.9	43	8.3	6021

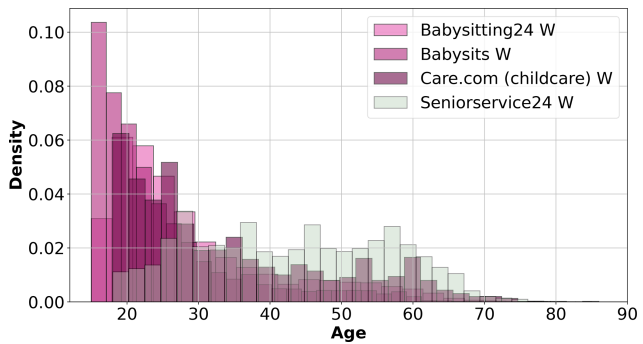


Figure 3. Distribution of worker age for platforms with age information and *n* > 1000. The purple shades represent childcare platforms, while the senior care platform Seniorservice24 appears in green.

skill expectations and time commitments associated with different forms of care work. Table 2 provides an overview of key age statistics across platforms, while Fig. 3 visualises the full age distributions. Together, they highlight substantial variation between the two care types.

Across childcare-oriented platforms, the age distribution is strongly right-skewed, indicating that childcare platform work is predominantly taken up by younger individuals. On Babysitting24, workers have a median age of 25 and a mean age of 28.8 (standard deviation 11.8). Similarly, Babysits shows an even younger profile, with a median age of 21 and a mean age of 24.5, while Care.com’s childcare workers are somewhat older on average (median 29, mean 34.0).

Many workers on childcare platforms are under 25 years old. This is particularly pronounced on Babysits, where 66.5 % of workers are younger than 25, followed by Babysitting24 with 48.2 %. Even on Care.com, which skews older, 33.1 % of childcare workers are under 25. These figures indicate that platformised childcare work is largely sought out by adolescents and young adults.

The lower bound of the observed age distributions corresponds closely to the platforms’ minimum age requirements, which are typically set at 15 or 18. However, manual inspection of worker profiles reveals that some users appear to be younger than the officially permitted age, suggesting that age restrictions are occasionally bypassed by entering the minimum allowed age while disclosing a lower age in the profile description. As a result, the observed age distributions are

effectively left-truncated at the platform minimum, likely inflating the number of workers reported at exactly 15 or 18 years of age.

In contrast, Seniorservice24, which focuses on senior care, attracts a significantly older workforce. Workers on this platform have a median age of 43 and a mean age of 42.9 (standard deviation 13.5), with only 8.3 % under 25, highlighting a stark contrast to childcare platforms. This age profile reflects how care labour markets are segmented by age and life stage, assigning different forms of care work to distinct worker demographics.

4.2.2 Gender

Care work is widely documented as a highly gendered form of labour, with both childcare and senior care predominantly performed by women (Schwiter and Steiner, 2020). In this section, we explore the extent to which platform-mediated care work mirrors this pattern. As described in Sect. 3.3.2, we infer gender from users' names and thus are limited to a binary gender categorisation.

Across all platforms for which gender could be inferred, we found that care work is overwhelmingly feminised. On the worker side, women constitute the vast majority of profiles across all platforms, ranging from 78.8 % on Seniorservice24 to 88.3 % on Care.com and Tagesmutter Verein Zürich, respectively. Childcare platforms in particular exhibit consistently high shares of female workers, while male workers account for only a small minority of profiles, typically between 3 % and 10 %.

This gender inequality is also visible on the demand side of the care platforms. For platforms where customers' names are available, which is only Babysits.ch and GreatAuPair,³ women again make up the majority. On Babysits, 58.4 % of job posters are inferred to be women, compared to 22.6 % men, with the remainder classified as unknown. We can conclude that women not only perform the majority of platform-mediated care work but also represent the majority of those demanding care work and thus organising the outsourcing of care work.

Taken together, these findings indicate that platformisation does not neutralise the gender inequality in care work. Instead, care platforms mirror highly gendered divisions of labour on both the supply and demand side. While this gender inequality is so normalised in society that it would probably be hard to build a platform where these inequalities do not occur, some platforms subtly reinforce this gender division. MisGrosi provides a particularly illustrative example: here, the platform name strongly suggests that the target group on the workers' side is older women – which presumably shapes who creates a profile on the platform. Therefore, gendered participation is not only driven by societal expectations but

also reinforced through platforms' cues that signal what an appropriate care provider's gender would be. Other examples are the pictures of female care workers on the entry pages of Babysitting24, Care.com or Seniorservice24. This highlights how platforms actively reinforce gendered divisions of labour through naming, the pictures they use in their advertising and how they frame the platform.

4.3 What is the geography of childcare platform work?

Scholars have theorised and analysed platform work predominantly as an urban phenomenon (Barns, 2020). They would not claim that platformisation is inexistent or negligible beyond urban areas, but most studies focus on big cities. This is at least partially due to platform workers' greater visibility in urban environments: delivery and transport workers, the most visible platform workers, indeed primarily operate in cities where demand is condensed. However, feminist researchers have questioned the extent to which this also applies to platform-mediated care work (Bauriedl and Strüver, 2020).

Our analysis shows that the correlation between population density and worker/customer prevalence is much weaker than one might expect. For our evaluation, we standardised the location data we have about workers and customers and cross-referenced them with population density data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2023). We use population density instead of absolute population numbers as we want to compare rural with urban areas and as municipalities vary in size, we assume population density to be a better measure of urbanity.

To illustrate patterns, we focus on the largest platform, Babysitting24, but similar patterns emerge across other platforms. Figure 4⁴ plots the population density against the workers per capita for Babysitting24 workers as an example. Here, we can already see an important insight, which is that the variance in the user density depends on the population density (in statistics, this is called “heteroscedasticity”): in highly populated areas, user density is relatively consistent, but in low-density (more rural) areas, it varies widely. This is because small rural municipalities have fewer users overall, so a handful of users can disproportionately affect the measure of users per capita. We can also see that the population density data are not normally distributed: there is a high number of municipalities with low population density.

These low-density municipalities are presumably small, rural ones. The high number of small municipalities unsurprisingly means that we find a high share of municipalities with no registered workers/customers for some platforms. On the biggest platform (Babysitting24), this number is comparably low: we found no workers in only 14.8 % of municipalities and no customers in 18.1 % of municipalities. On

³Due to the small number of job profiles on GreatAuPair, we do not consider these data for our interpretation.

⁴Because of outliers, we only plot the 1st to 99th percentile of the workers per capita (± 2 % of padding).

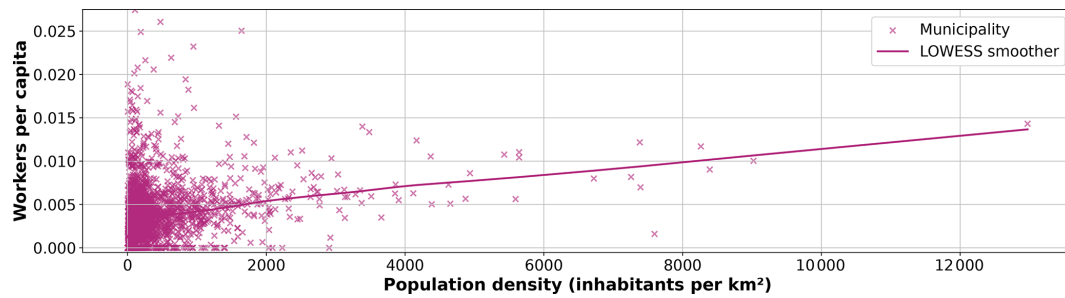


Figure 4. Workers per capita on Babysitting24 compared to the population density across all Swiss municipalities.

Table 3. Share of municipalities with zero workers/customers by platform.

Platform	No workers (%)	No customers (%)
Babysitting24	14.8	18.1
Seniorservice24	49.6	85.7
Babysits.ch	59.6	85.7
Care.com (childcare)	68.4	–
MisGrosi	97.7	75.7
RockMyBaby	–	99.4
ZipfelZapf	–	99.3
Tagesmutterverein Zürich	–	98.3
GreatAuPair	98.3	99.6

other platforms, however, the absence of users is much more widespread (see Table 3). For example, on smaller platforms, over 99 % of municipalities had no registered customers.

This heavy zero-inflation complicates our correlation analysis: when many municipalities have no registered workers or customers, this creates ties, which means that multiple items (here, municipalities) are equal in a variable value (here, zero for the “users per capita” variable). In such a case, standard rank correlation measures, including Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient and Kendall’s tau, can be misleading (Kendall, 1945; Woodbury, 1940; Student, 1921). While Kendall’s tau-*b* accounts for ties (Kendall, 1945)⁵ and provides a more reliable measure of monotonic association, even this can be misleading when most values are zero. For these high-zero platforms, we therefore rely primarily on scatterplots with LOWESS (locally weighted scatterplot smoothing) smoothers to assess trends visually (which we do not show here due to a lack of space). LOWESS is a technique that fits a smooth curve through a scatterplot, showing general patterns without assuming a strict linear relationship (Cleveland, 1979).

Looking at the LOWESS smoothers, we find across platforms that the relationship between population density and users per capita ranges from flat to weakly increasing. In some cases, the data exhibit non-monotonic patterns where

platform work per capita increases with density up to a point, then decreases. This is the case for Babysitting24 (customers), Seniorservice24 (workers), Care.com (workers) and MisGrosi (customers).

As our largest platform, Babysitting24, suffers less from the zero-inflation, we use Kendall’s tau-*b* correlation coefficient between the population density and users (workers/customers) per capita.⁶ Here, we observe weak to modest positive trends: Babysitting24 (workers) with $\tau = 0.21$ and Babysitting24 (customers) with $\tau = 0.16$. The small positive correlation as well as our insights from the LOWESS smoothers imply that while the number of users per capita increases with the population density, this effect is not nearly as pronounced as one might think and often not visible at all. Furthermore, we assume that some workers do not register with their actual address but choose a location with a higher population density to be more visible to customers. Taking this worker strategy into account, we can thus conclude that platform work in the care segment is not a phenomenon primarily present in areas of high population density, but rather one that attracts workers and customers in all of Switzerland.

5 Conclusions

With this study, we aimed at assessing the size and the geographical prevalence of the Swiss platform market for childcare and thereby reflect the potentials and limitations of visibilising feminised segments of the platform market with a data scraping methodology. We were able to scrape data of platform workers and customers from eight childcare platforms and one elderly care platform that are actively used in German-speaking Switzerland. Our scraped platform data allowed us to analyse data from about 58 000 worker and 25 000 customer profiles on Swiss childcare platforms. Roughly 11 000 of these childcare workers had logged into the platform within the 31 d and had been registered for more than 31 d prior to our data collection. Based on these data, we are confident in challenging the Swiss Federal Council’s con-

⁵Kendall (1945) refers to what we now know as “tau-*b*” as “tau-*w*”.

⁶We refrain from using Pearson’s correlation coefficient due to non-normality and heteroscedasticity.

clusion that this market is negligible (Swiss Federal Council, 2021).

Due to a number of limitations our study underestimates market size. We did not include platforms that are targeted primarily at French or Italian speakers and data from platforms that are either only available as apps or do not share worker or customer profiles. Furthermore, we were unable to draw reliable conclusions on the number of actually mediated jobs because transactions may occur off-platform even if initial contact was made on the platform. We also had to rely on a binary gender classification of users that fails to capture the breadth and complexity of gender identities. The scrapable data did not allow us to reliably identify other potentially relevant worker demographics beyond gender and age, such as ethnicity or migration status, so we could not analyse how feminisation intersects with racialisation or ethnicisation. Last but not least, our measurement of 31 d activity levels discounts patterns of typically female life courses – namely longer breaks related to maternity leave or childcare responsibilities. We therefore have to conclude that many key aspects of the platform market remain largely invisible to us. Also when mediated via platforms, much of the largely informalised labour market segment of childcare work continues to elude quantification. This demonstrates the limits of our attempt at counter-mapping to visibilise a feminised labour market segment.

Despite these limitations, our data confirm a continuing feminisation of the care workforce, with 79 % to 83 % of workers having female names compared to 3 % to 10 % of workers with male names. (The gender of the rest is unknown.) Also, customer profiles show a gender bias: on the large platform that discloses customer names, 58 % indicate female customers and 23 % male customers. While providing only a one-time snapshot, we can conclude our initial speculations that platformisation might markedly reduce the feminisation of care work and open up new employment opportunities to a larger share of male workers has not (yet) come to pass.

Finally, and most importantly, our data pose a challenge to the urban bias in platform research: with regard to childcare platforms, we find only a weak correlation between population density and workers/customers per capita. Taking into account that some workers may strategically locate themselves in more densely populated areas than they actually live to attract additional customers, the correlation becomes negligible. While we bear the limitations of our data in mind, this contradicts the popular presumption that people in villages and smaller towns would use platformised care services less because they can rely on neighbourhood networks. It also questions the prevalent image of a platform worker as living in a big city.

This has important implications for future directions in platform research. Platformisation has so far been conceptualised as a primarily urban phenomenon, with male delivery riders and Uber drivers in big cities as its epitomes.

Taking into account that less visible feminised work in private households equally takes place in more rural environments challenges our assumptions of required density and limited spatiality of place-based platform markets. It also brings many empirical research lacunae into sight. To name just a few, how do platform workers get to and from their workplaces when distances are too long for bicycling, and buses are not available? How does this impact their ratio of paid versus unpaid working time and their earning potentials? And how does platform work in private households align or misalign with unpaid care work? We suggest that future research for example takes female childcare workers who try to find platform work in a more rural environment as the subject of study for a change and explore how this would influence geographical understandings of platformisation.

Code availability. The code used to scrape the platforms, clean the scraped data and evaluate the data is made publicly available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23578283> (Hertweck, 2026).

Data availability. We do not make the scraped profile data publicly accessible as they contain personal information about platform workers and customers, such as names, ages, locations and profile texts, which would allow individuals to be identified. For reasons of privacy and research ethics, we store these data securely and report them in aggregated form only (see Sect. 3.2). Aggregated data can be obtained from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request. The reference data on postal codes, population and population density are publicly available from the Swiss Federal Office of Topography (Swisstopo, 2024, <https://www.swisstopo.admin.ch/en/official-directory-of-towns-and-cities>) and the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2023, 2026; <https://statatlas.bfs.admin.ch/?lang=de#c=indicator&view=map179>, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/grundlagen/agvch/gemeindenamen-gebraeuchlichen-uebersetzungen.html>).

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